

RED CROSS OF FRANCE

By L. L. DOCK

THE Red Cross of France is composed of three societies and their branches: the French Society for Aid to Wounded Soldiers, founded in 1864; this was the society recognized by the International Committee at Geneva, and was the only one so recognized until January, 1907: The *Association des Dames francaises*, founded in 1879 (which also admits men); and the Union of Women of France in 1881. In 1907 these three societies became affiliated under the name "Central Committee of the French Red Cross" and the president and general secretary of each society have a seat in this committee.

During the war of 1870 France had some auxiliary women's societies, but they were disbanded after the war. The French women were far behind the Germans in organization, for Germany had over sixty thousand women united in close and systematic articulation under the Red Cross. Nor had the French women realized the necessity of preparing, in time of peace, by training nurses to be ready for war. Strangely enough, the most authoritative members of the older society, when urged to consider the advantages of organizing women as Germany had done, did not believe it would be successful! The experiment was made by Doctor Duchaussey of the Paris University. In 1877, he started the first class in First Aid, and two years after, encouraged by his results, founded the association of "Dames."

The French Red Cross is numerous, wealthy, and very generous. The women send travelling libraries to distant outposts, provide lavishly in times of disaster, and have abundant and complete outfits ready for every emergency. But in nursing they have never gone beyond a superficial stage. They have done nothing toward establishing training schools for professional nurses, but have an enthusiastic craze for volunteer nursing. Dressed in a nurse's uniform, society women, mothers of families, teachers, and school-girls delight in taking "courses" of which there is an extraordinary number—courses of lectures from professors of medical science, of demonstrations in First Aid, in visiting dispensaries to "do dressings." The latter is the especial fad, and one can read pages of sentimental gush (some of it, one is surprised to see, written by the doctors) over the admirable devotion of the women who

thus desert their social engagements to attend the consultations and assist in the minor surgery of out-patient departments.

Diplomas are given for these courses, yet the ladies scorn to "clear up" after dressings (personal information given by the head of a hospital); they are embarrassed and pretend not to have heard when purgatives are mentioned (The Red Cross of France, Maxime du Camp, p. 118) and the pharmacy is the domain of young ladies whose age does not permit them to go into the wards. (Women and War. M. Leo Claretie, p. 8.)

The "Dames" have established a hospital of twenty-four beds near Paris for the purpose of teaching volunteers. It has a large out-patient department, and here more than three thousand seven hundred persons have taken "courses," of whom six hundred and fifty have received diplomas. The Association of "Dames" claims the ability to put thirty-six thousand nurses into action in time of war—all volunteers.

After the Boer War, when the society women were called by Dr. Treves, "a plague," Dr. Anna Hamilton of Bordeaux wrote to the International Committee of the Red Cross at Geneva, pointing out the difference between the work of these amateurs and that of the English nurses, and made this formal request:

That, upon the initiative of the International Committee, every central society (national) of the Red Cross should be called upon to state whether, in their countries, they possessed organizations analogous to the English Army Nursing Reserve Service; that is to say, associations of nurses of superior education who in times of peace are in daily and nightly charge of the sick, to the exclusion of all other nursing bodies, and who, in time of war, are entirely at the disposition of the military authorities.—(Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge, 1901, p. 40.)

As yet, however, this request has not been acted upon, probably because of an unwillingness to offend the volunteer army.

